

## I.0 INTRODUCTION

### I.1 BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF AREA

The King Range National Conservation Area (KRNCA) is located along the rugged northern California coast about 60 miles south of Eureka and 200 miles north of San Francisco. An abrupt wall of mountains thrusts 4,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean, making the area one of the most spectacular and remote stretches of coastline in the continental U.S. The elemental beauty and ever-changing mood of the Pacific Ocean meeting the wild, undeveloped coastline, old-growth forests and rugged peaks of the King Range provided the rationale for the original NCA designation, and continues to draw people from all over the world to visit the “Lost Coast” of California. Visitors pursue a wide variety of activities including hiking and backpacking on over 80 miles of trails, camping, beach-combing, surfing, hunting, vehicular touring and sight-seeing on a 45-mile network of BLM and county-maintained roads, environmental education and wildlife viewing. Additional uses involve special forest products collection (mostly mushrooms) and grazing of cattle by several local ranchers.

*King Range Coastline*



The King Range Act (Public Law 91-476) established it as the nation’s first National Conservation Area on October 21, 1970. It represents the culmination of years of effort to protect the area, beginning in 1929 when it was first withdrawn from deposition or sale under the public lands laws. The 1970 Act directed the BLM to complete “a comprehensive, balanced, and coordinated plan of land use, development, and management . . . based on an inventory and evaluation of the available resources and requirements for such resources, and on the topography and other features of the area.” The King Range NCA was formally established on September 21, 1974, with the final acceptance of the King Range Management Program (KRMP) and a public dedication ceremony held at Shelter Cove.

The 1974 Management Program detailed management actions for approximately 54,000 acres of public and private lands within the boundaries of the KRNCA. In 1974, 35,000 acres were publicly owned, and 19,000 acres were in private ownership. The Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579) extended the boundary of the KRNCA to its

current configuration. Acquisition of private lands within the KRNCA has consolidated public ownership within the area. Currently the area includes approximately 57,000 acres of public and 6,000 acres of private lands. Numerous parcels of BLM-managed lands also adjoin the boundary of the area.

The BLM Arcata Field Office is responsible for management of the KRNCA. A Project Office/Visitor Center, staffed by a manager plus resource, fire, ranger and maintenance staff is located in Whitethorn, at the southern end of the KRNCA, and is responsible for on-ground management. Staff from both offices are responsible for the preparation of the KRNCA plan update.

### **1.1.1 Planning Area Description and Map**

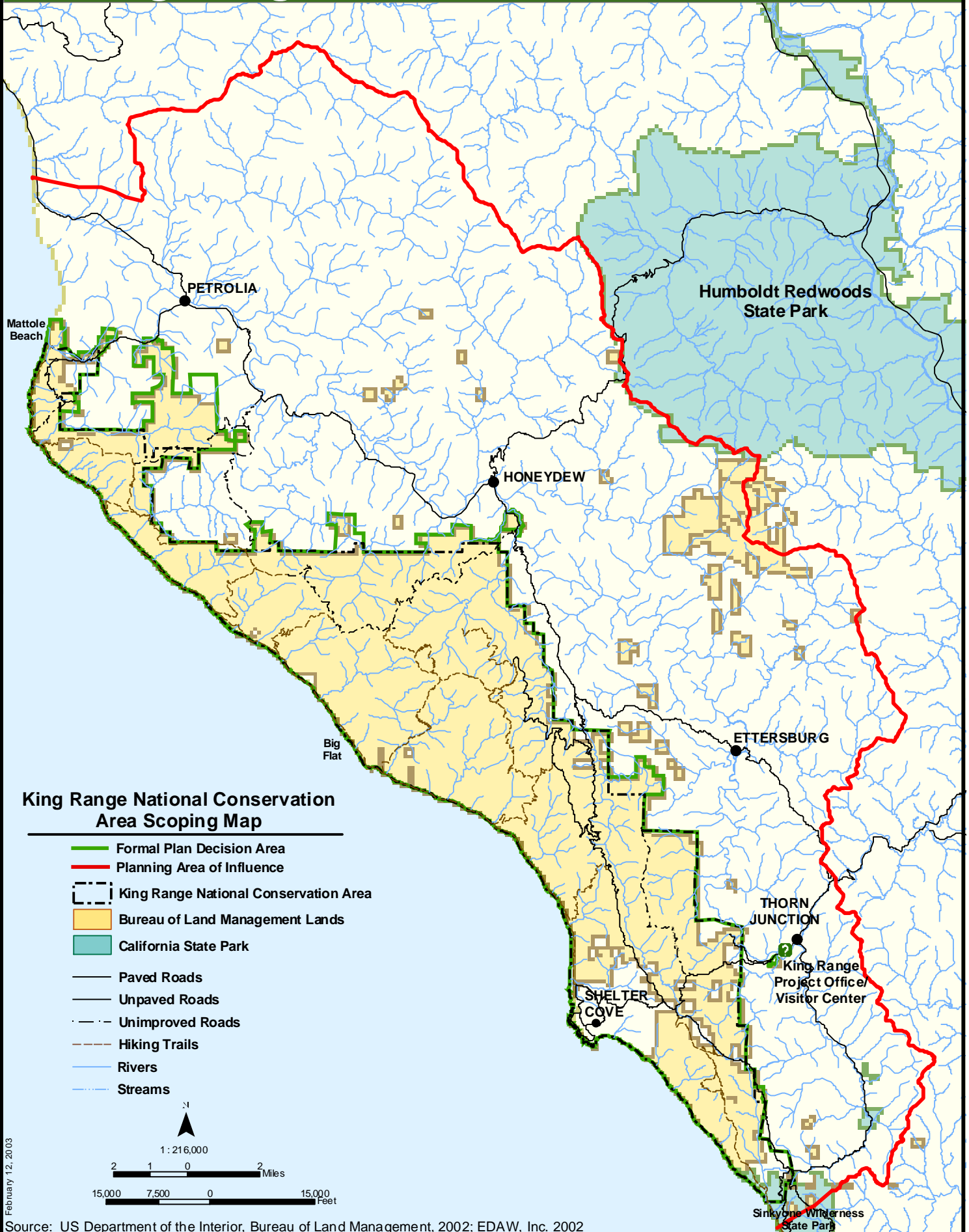
The formal plan decision area encompasses lands within the Congressionally-designated KRNCA, as well as BLM-managed lands contiguous to the KRNCA and two non-contiguous BLM parcels: one containing the KRNCA Project Office/Visitor Center, and the other, the Honeydew Creek Campground. Formal decisions in the plan will only apply to these lands.

However, a planning “area of influence” will also include the surrounding region stretching from McNutt Gulch near Petrolia in the north to Whale Gulch in the south, including the Mattole River Watershed (see Figure 1). The plan will recognize that these nearby lands, communities, resource values and uses are all affected by management of the KRNCA, and their use/values in turn affect management of the KRNCA. For example, land use decisions in the portion of the Mattole watershed within the KRNCA can affect anadromous fish spawning success for the entire Mattole Watershed. Also, community efforts such as the “Redwoods to the Sea” project, the Mattole Headwaters Ecological Reserve, and the Mill Creek Conservancy Project are encouraging stewardship programs that link the resource values of the KRNCA to these nearby lands. The plan may suggest actions for areas or programs that are not under the BLM’s jurisdiction but directly affect KRNCA management (for example, county road signs, tourism information programs, etc.). However, final decisions regarding these actions will rest with the appropriate agency or community land stewardship plans/programs. Similarly, actions related to BLM lands outside the KRNCA planning area will be carried forward as recommendations for incorporation into the appropriate BLM plan.

BLM planning guidance promotes making land use plan decisions at different geographic scales to ensure that issues are addressed in their entirety and to encourage public involvement. The KRNCA Management Plan update will follow this guidance and address certain issues that extend beyond the planning area so that they are considered holistically. For example, the communities of Garberville, Redway and Ferndale are outside the planning area boundary, but are directly linked to the KRNCA regarding tourism and recreation issues.

The planning area is in Northern California Coast Ranges Geographic Province and includes about 38 miles of rugged Pacific coastline, extending inland up to 12 miles. The spine of the King Range is the most prominent geographic feature, and separates a number of west slope coastal watersheds from the Mattole River, which drains the entire east side of the KRNCA. The 340 square mile Mattole watershed historically has supported significant runs of anadromous fish such as salmon and steelhead. The fishery has been threatened by a variety of human impacts, and local communities are actively working to restore the watershed. Public lands in the KRNCA encompass about 12 percent of the watershed.

# King Range National Conservation Area



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Source: US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 2002; EDAW, Inc. 2002

## **I.2 PURPOSE AND NEED OF KING RANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The purpose of the King Range Management Plan update is to evaluate the original plan and reaffirm and reestablish guidance, objectives, policies, and management actions for the KRNCA that reflect current issues, knowledge, and conditions. The planning effort will be comprehensive in nature, evaluating existing management plans and resolving or addressing issues within the KRNCA identified through agency, interagency, and public scoping efforts.

Several additions and adjustments to the original management program have occurred since 1974 as environmental conditions, public needs, and management issues and strategies have changed: rule making has been implemented through the publishing of *Federal Register* notes; activity-level plans have been developed and implemented; and the Northwest Forest Plan (April 1994) amended all public land use management plans in the Pacific Northwest, including the King Range Management Program. An additional plan amendment was made in 1998 to change management of Black Sands Beach to non-motorized use only.

The revised management plan will analyze the current management situation and identify desired future conditions to be maintained or achieved, management actions necessary to achieve objectives, and a schedule and cost estimate for implementing the actions necessary to achieve stated goals. The plan will address and integrate all existing management plans and programs, including but not limited to fire management, livestock grazing, threatened and endangered species, recreation and visitor services, watershed management, and transportation. The plan will meet the stated requirements of the King Range Act.

The following list of specific factors illustrates the need for preparation of an updated Management Plan. The existing plan is 29 years old. Many conditions, both social and resource-based, have changed since 1974, including:

1. The passage of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) in 1976 expanded the boundaries of the KRNCA and established guidelines, rules, and regulations for the administration and management of public lands. FLPMA also required lands within the KRNCA to be evaluated for wilderness values, and established interim management requirements to protect these values.
2. Listing under the Endangered Species Act of the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, chinook and coho salmon, and steelhead trout, among other species, has significantly affected forest management activities in the Pacific Northwest, including the King Range. Forest management objectives proposed in the 1974 plan are no longer achievable.
3. The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan amended all federal land use plans and established land allocations and standards/guidelines for management of habitat for late-successional and old-growth forest related species within the range of the northern spotted owl, including the KRNCA.
4. The counties in which the KRNCA lies, Humboldt and Mendocino, and the entire State of California have undergone dramatic changes in social and economic conditions since 1974. Locally, the economic base continues to shift from mostly

resource extraction (particularly timber) to a mixed economy of which tourism is a major component. Tourism is also a key part of California's economy. The population of the two counties continues to grow at a moderate rate. California's population has grown by more than 50% since 1974 and is expected to double in the next 40 years. Approximately 10 million people live within a five hour drive of the KRNCA. Recreation on public lands has changed dramatically over the past 28 years, both in levels of use and in the kinds of recreational activities, including commercial use, which were not addressed in the 1974 plan.

5. During the past 10 years, local and regional conservation organizations have begun to look to BLM to acquire lands, or have acquired lands themselves for transfer to the BLM. They are entrusting the BLM to manage these lands to protect significant ecological values and to add to regional biodiversity adjoining and surrounding the KRNCA. The plan update will assess the stewardship of newly acquired lands such as the Mill Creek and Squaw Creek parcels as they relate to the management of the KRNCA.